Psychological and Relationship Predictors of Supportive and Undermining Coparenting

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Abstract

Whereas supportive coparenting behavior (warm, cooperative) is linked to better child social-emotional development, undermining coparenting behavior (hostile, competitive) is associated with problems in child social-emotional development such as aggression and inattention. However, few studies have examined prenatal precursors of coparenting behavior in the child's first year. This study examined associations between parental psychological and relationship characteristics during the third trimester of pregnancy and observed coparenting behavior at 3 and 9 months postpartum. Data were obtained from 182 expectant couples. Parental psychological and relationship characteristics were measured via questionnaires in the third trimester. The characteristics assessed included perspective-taking, empathy, and personal distress (Interpersonal Reactivity Index), expected self-efficacy (Parenting Expected Self-Efficacy Scale), relationship dedication, confidence, and constraint (Commitment Inventory), avoidance and anxiety (Experiences in Close Relationships Scale), and relationship conflict (Negative Interaction Scale). Observed coparenting at 3 and 9 months was assessed using 5-minute mother-father-infant free-play tasks. A series of five point rating scales was used to assess coparenting behavior from these videotaped interactions. Correlation analyses indicated that fathers' characteristics are more closely associated with coparenting behavior than mothers' characteristics. Thus, attention to expectant fathers' characteristics may be especially useful for pinpointing expectant couples at risk for coparenting problems to help ultimately create better environments for children's social-emotional development.

Psychological and Relationship Predictors of Supportive and Undermining Coparenting

The concept of coparenting encompasses the relationship developed and maintained when two parents "have overlapping or shared responsibility for rearing particular children, and consists of the support and coordination (or lack of it) that parental figures exhibit in childrearing" (Feinberg, 2003, p. 96). Minuchin (1974) recognized the coparenting relationship as the "executive subsystem" of the family that emerges at the birth of a couple's first child. As members of the executive subsystem, or coparenting relationship, parents together manage family behavior, relationships, interactions, and outcomes. As such, the functioning of the coparenting relationship is a critical influence on the well-being of individual family members (Feinberg, 2003).

Interest in understanding the factors that predict the degree to which coparenting relationships are supportive (warm, complimentary, cooperative) versus undermining (hostile, critical, competitive) has developed because researchers have found links between poorer coparenting, or lower support and higher undermining, and negative child outcomes including higher levels of child aggression, externalizing symptoms, and insecure attachment (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2010; Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosh, 2001; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010).

Research has confirmed that coparenting is associated with parental adjustment, parenting, and child adjustment (Feinberg, 2003). Furthermore, the coparenting relationship, compared to measures of general marital quality, appears to be more strongly related to child outcomes (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007; Frosch, Mangelsdorf, & McHale, 2000; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). However, current research lacks a complete

understanding of predictors of and influences on supportive and undermining coparenting relationships.

Particular interest has focused on the transition to parenthood when the coparenting relationship is developing. Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) agree with many other researchers that the initiation of the coparenting relationship is at the point of childbirth. However, prebirth discussions, mental representations, and individual characteristics are important prebirth predictors of coparenting (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). To fully understand the development of the coparenting relationship and prevent coparenting problems, which may lead to poorer child outcomes, continued research on the determinants of the coparenting relationship is necessary.

In his theoretical model of influences on coparenting relationships, Feinberg (2003) identified factors that affect the development and quality of the coparenting relationship. According to Feinberg's (2003) model, there are individual, family, and extrafamilial influences that affect the coparenting relationship. Individual influences consist of the parental characteristics of emotional and mental health, attitudes, and beliefs. Characteristics of the child's temperament, gender, and health also play a role in individual influences. Family-level influences are the overall dyadic relationship quality between the parents, such as support, respect, and disagreements. Extrafamilial influences include stressors and support (e.g., economic stress, social support, etc.).

However, why some parents develop a supportive coparenting relationship and why others develop an undermining coparenting relationship remains a question for researchers. Relatively few studies have examined multiple factors in Feinberg's (2003) model of influences on the coparenting relationship. It is important to point out that previous research begins

studying the coparenting relationship at different points in time, before and after the transition to parenthood. At the transition to parenthood, research conducted by Van Egeren (2003) reported that in the development of a supportive or undermining coparenting relationship, maternal characteristics are pivotal. Mothers who have higher trait reactance were part of poorer coparenting relationships. Additionally, mothers who have greater maternal ego development were part of more positive coparenting relationships (Van Egeren, 2003). Paternal ego development also plays an important role in coparenting relationships. Lower levels of ego resilience is linked to poorer coparenting (Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, & Kuersten-Hogan, 2008). Schoppe-Sullivan and Mangelsdorf (2013) found that lower family socioeconomic status and greater father negative emotionality were associated with observations of greater undermining coparenting behavior. Other studies have reported mixed results when examining the relationship between parental characteristics and observed coparenting after the transition to parenthood (Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf, 2013). However, Talbot and McHale (2004) reported higher levels of maternal self-control and paternal flexibility are linked to supportive coparenting.

Existing research has provided insights into important aspects to further study, but has not allowed direct comparison of a large number of factors measured at the transition to parenthood. Additionally, conclusions concerning psychological characteristics related to the quality of the coparenting relationship have been inconsistent, indicating that further research is necessary to draw more confident conclusions (Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011).

The Present Study

My research intention was to determine the associations between parent characteristics and the resulting supportive or undermining coparenting relationship observed and reported at 3

and 9 months postpartum. To investigate these associations, I used data from The New Parents Project (NPP), a study of 182 couples expecting their first child who were studied across their transition to parenthood. The following question guided my research: How are parental psychological and relationship characteristics measured in the third trimester of pregnancy associated with supportive and undermining coparenting at 3 and 9 months postpartum?

It was hypothesized that parents with more adaptive personal characteristics and stronger romantic relationships would be part of coparenting relationships characterized by greater supportive and less undermining coparenting behavior. In particular, parents who reported greater interpersonal empathy, stronger expected self-efficacy, greater relationship commitment, and less conflict, anxiety, and avoidance would be part of more supportive and less undermining coparenting relationships.

Method

Participants

Data from the New Parents Project (NPP) were utilized. Data collection began in October 2008 and spanned two years. The sample consisted of 182 dual-earner married (86%) or cohabiting (14%) couples who were followed across their transition to parenthood. To meet inclusion criteria for this project, each family must have been expecting their first child, which is vital to understanding the development of the coparenting relationship. In the sample, 86% of mothers and 89% of fathers reported "white" as their race. Additionally, 77% of mothers and 67% of fathers reported having at least a bachelor's degree. The average annual income of the sample was $80,000.

Procedure

In Phase 1 of the study, which took place during the third trimester of pregnancy, expectant parents completed a series of questionnaires, time diaries, interviews, and videotaped interaction tasks. Phase 2 of the study took place at 3 months postpartum. The new parents completed questionnaires, time diaries, and videotaped interactions. Phase 3 of the study took place at 6 months postpartum. Parents completed questionnaires, time diaries, and a phone interview. Phase 4 of the study took place at 9 months postpartum. This Phase resembled the tasks completed during Phase 2. Parents completed questionnaires, time diaries, and several videotaped interactions.

My study utilized data from Phases 1, 2, and 4. Questionnaires focused on psychological and relationship characteristics from Phase 1 were examined to determine correlates of the quality of the coparenting relationships formed by new parents at Phases 2 and 4.

Measures

Psychological Characteristics. To assess mothers' and fathers' self-reported psychological characteristics as predictors of supportive and undermining coparenting, I utilized multiple questionnaires that were collected during the third trimester of pregnancy. Expectant mothers and fathers completed surveys independently. Parents completed the 21-item *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* developed and validated by Davis (1980), in which parents rated the degree to which the statements described themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = doesn't describe me well; 5 = describes me well). This questionnaire assessed three dimensions of interpersonal reactivity: perspective-taking (α = .79 for mothers and .76 for fathers; 7 items; e.g., "Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place"), empathic concern (α = .72 for mothers and .74 for fathers; 7 items; e.g., "I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person"), and personal distress (α = .78 for mothers and .77 for fathers; 7

items; e.g., "When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces"). Parents were also assessed on their expected self-efficacy as a parent measured and validated by Teti and Gelfand's (1991) *Parenting Self-Efficacy Measure* (α = .80 for mothers and .82 for fathers). This 6-item measure asked parents to assess how good they will be at various parenting situations (e.g., When your baby is upset, fussy, or crying, how good will you be at soothing him or her?") on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = not good at all; 4 = very good).

Relationship Characteristics. To assess mothers' and fathers' self-reported relationship characteristics as predictors of supportive and undermining coparenting, I utilized multiple questionnaires that were collected during the third trimester of pregnancy. Expectant mothers and fathers completed surveys independently. Parents completed the 12-item *Commitment Inventory* developed and validated by Stanley and Markman (1992), Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen (1994), and Whitton et al. (2007), in which parents rated the degree to which they agree with statements about themselves on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). This questionnaire assessed three dimensions of commitment: dedication (α = .49 for mothers and .55 for fathers; 4 items; e.g., "My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life"), confidence (α = .93 for mothers and .82 for fathers; 4 items; e.g., "I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future"), and constraint (α = .84 for mothers and .83 for fathers; 4 items; e.g., "I feel trapped or stuck in this relationship"). Additionally, parents completed the 36-item *Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire* developed and validated by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998), in which parents rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about their relationship experiences on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 =disagree strongly; 7 = agree strongly). This questionnaire assessed two dimensions of relationship experiences: avoidance (α = .92 for mothers and .88 for fathers; 18

items; e.g., "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close") and anxiety (α = .90 for mothers and .90 for fathers; 18 items; e.g., "I worry about being alone"). To assess parents' perceived relationship conflict, parents completed the 4-item *Negative Interaction Scale* (α = .66 for mothers and .76 for fathers) developed and validated by Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002). Parents reported how often they and their spouse/partner experienced various situations (1 = never or almost never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = frequently; e.g., "Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bring up past hurts").

Coparenting. At 3 and 9 months postpartum, observations of coparenting behavior were obtained from triadic interactions between the mother, father, and infant. At 3 months, both parents and the child were videotaped for five minutes while playing with a play gym. At 9 months, both parents and the child were videotaped for five minutes while playing with a jack-in-the-box. A series of five-point scales (see Appendix) were utilized by teams of trained coders to determine the extent to which the coparenting relationship was supportive or undermining (Cowan & Cowan, 1996; Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf, 2013). The three supportive scales that are assessed include couple *cooperation* (e.g., sharing the same approach when playing with the child; γ = .73 at 3 months and .83 at 9 months), *pleasure* expressed by the mother when observing the father and child interact (γ = .68 at 3 months and .83 at 9 months), the amount of *warmth* (e.g., smiling, eye contact, laughing) expressed or communicated from the mother to the father (γ = .86 at 3 months and .79 at 9 months), *pleasure* expressed by the father when observing the mother and child interact (γ = .75 at 3 months and .86 at 9 months), and the amount of *warmth* (e.g., smiling, eye contact, laughing) expressed or communicated from the father to the mother (γ = .82 at 3 months and .79 at 9 months). The three undermining scales that are assessed include couple *competition* (e.g., interference in one parent's play attempts by the

other parent; γ = .80 at 3 months and .74 at 9 months), the amount of *coldness* (e.g., ignoring the other parent, lacking interaction) expressed or communicated from the mother to the father (γ = .82 at 3 months and .87 at 9 months), *displeasure* expressed by the mother when observing the father and child interact (γ = .89 at 3 months and .84 at 9 months), the amount of *coldness* expressed or communicated from the father to the mother (γ = .85 at 3 months and .72 at 9 months), and *displeasure* expressed by the father when observing the mother and child interact (γ = .91 at 3 months and .88 at 9 months). The following equation was used to create two supportive variables (one at 3 months and one at 9 months) and two undermining variables (one at 3 months and one at 9 months): support at 3 months=(cooperation + ((mother warmth+ father warmth)/2) + ((mother pleasure + father pleasure)/2))/3; undermining at 3 months=(competition + ((mother coldness+ father coldness)/2) + ((mother displeasure + father displeasure)/2))/3.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for parental psychological and relationship characteristics. In general, the statistics indicate that for all three dimensions of Davis' (1980) *Interpersonal Reactivity Index*, mothers, on average, reported higher levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and personal distress compared to fathers. On average, mothers reported perspective-taking (M = 3.66, SD = 0.62) and personal distress (M = 2.47, SD = 0.68) near the center of the scale, indicating a neutral stance regarding whether the statements described (or did not describe) them well. For empathic concern, mothers reported that those statements were closer to describing them well (M = 4.09, SD = 0.56). On average, fathers reported perspective-taking (M = 3.46, SD = 0.65) and empathic concern (M = 3.64, SD = 0.63) near the center of the scale, indicating a more neutral stance regarding whether the statements described (or did not describe) them well. For personal distress, fathers reported that those statements were closer to

not describing them well (*M* = 2.08, *SD* = 0.62). Additionally, mothers (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = 0.37) and fathers (*M* = 3.45, *SD* = 0.42) reported similarly high levels of expected self-efficacy measured by Teti and Gelfand's (1991) *Parenting Self-Efficacy Measure*. In general, the descriptive statistics indicate that for all three dimensions of Stanley and Markman's (1992), Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen's, (1994), and Whitton et al's. (2007) *Commitment Inventory* measure, mothers and fathers reported similar levels of dedication, confidence, and constraint. On average, mothers reported high levels of dedication (*M* = 6.69, *SD* = 0.43) and confidence (*M* = 6.72, *SD* = 0.54) and low levels of constraint (*M* = 1.12, *SD* = 0.42). On average, fathers reported high levels of dedication (*M* = 6.58, *SD* = 0.60) and confidence (*M* = 6.66, *SD* = 0.58) and low levels of constraint (*M* = 1.20, *SD* = 0.59). The *Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire* by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) indicated that mothers reported lower levels of avoidance (*M* = 1.87, *SD* = 0.80) and higher levels of anxiety (*M* = 3.10, *SD* = 1.06) compared to fathers' reports of avoidance (*M* = 2.13, *SD* = 0.71) and anxiety (*M* = 2.64, *SD* = 1.01). However, in general, mothers and fathers reported relatively low levels of avoidance and anxiety. Descriptive statistics also showed that mothers (*M* = 1.58, *SD* = 0.41) and fathers (*M* = 1.61, *SD* = 0.46) reported low levels of relationship conflict.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics are included in Table 1 for the observed coparenting interaction scales including cooperation, competition, warmth, pleasure, coldness, and displeasure at 3 and 9 months postpartum. Means and standard deviations for the combined supportive and undermining scales are also reported. At 3 months, couples had higher levels of cooperation (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = 0.96) compared to competition (*M* = 1.94, *SD* = 0.98). Mothers' warmth (*M* = 3.00, *SD* = 0.79) and pleasure (*M* = 3.05, *SD* = 0.89) were near the middle of the scale. Fathers had slightly lower levels of warmth (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = 0.82) and pleasure (*M* = 2.79,

SD = 0.89) compared to mothers. Both mothers and fathers had lower levels of observed coldness and displeasure. However, mothers (*M* = 1.14, *SD* = 0.40) had slightly lower levels of coldness than fathers (*M* = 1.23, *SD* = 0.55) and fathers (*M* = 1.18, *SD* = 0.51) had slightly lower levels of displeasure than mothers (*M* = 1.26, *SD* = 0.58). For the combined supportive and undermining variables, parents were more supportive (*M* = 3.06, *SD* = 0.78) than undermining (*M* = 1.45, *SD* = 0.42).

At 9 months, couples had higher levels of cooperation (*M* = 3.98, *SD* = 0.96) compared to competition (*M* = 1.61, *SD* = 0.81). Mother's warmth (*M* = 3.79, *SD* = 0.90) and pleasure (*M* = 3.92, *SD* = 0.99) were near the middle to upper end of the scale. Fathers had slightly lower levels of warmth (*M* = 3.63, *SD* = 1.03) and pleasure (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = 1.03) compared to mothers. Both mothers and fathers had lower levels of observed coldness and displeasure. However, mothers (*M* = 1.27, *SD* = 0.57) had slightly lower levels of coldness than fathers (*M* = 1.40, *SD* = 0.75) and fathers (*M* = 1.60, *SD* = 0.89) had slightly lower levels of displeasure than mothers (*M* = 1.63, *SD* = 0.86). For the combined supportive and undermining variables, parents were more supportive (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = 0.88) than undermining (*M* = 1.52, *SD* = 0.64). Interestingly, when comparing the observed variables at 3 and 9 months, mothers and fathers showed more cooperation, competition, warmth, pleasure, coldness, and displeasure at 9 months than at 3 months.

Associations Between Paternal Psychological and Relationship Characteristics and Observed Coparenting

Many significant correlations were found between paternal psychological and relationship characteristics and observed supportive and undermining coparenting at 3 and 9 months postpartum (see Table 2). Regarding psychological characteristics, there was a

statistically significant positive correlation between father's perspective-taking and support at 9 months ($r = .18$, $p < .05$). Additionally, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between father's perspective-taking and undermining at 3 months ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$). This means that fathers who reported higher levels of perspective-taking were part of more supportive coparenting relationships at 9 months and less undermining coparenting relationships at 3 months. Statistically significant correlations also existed between father's reported empathy and supportive ($r = .22$, $p < .01$) and undermining ($r = -.20$, $p < .05$) coparenting relationships at 9 months. This means that fathers who reported higher levels of empathy were part of coparenting relationships that were more supportive and less undermining at 9 months postpartum. In addition, statistically significant correlations existed between father's reported personal distress and supportive ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$) and undermining ($r = .17$, $p < .05$) coparenting relationships at 3 months. This means that fathers who reported higher levels of personal distress were part of coparenting relationships that were less supportive and more undermining at 3 months postpartum. Statistically significant correlations were also found between father's reported expected self-efficacy and supportive coparenting relationships at 3 months ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$), supportive coparenting relationships at 9 months ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$), and undermining coparenting relationships at 3 months ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). This means that fathers who reported higher levels of expected self-efficacy were part of less supportive coparenting relationships at 3 and 9 months and more undermining coparenting relationships at 3 months.

Statistically significant correlations were also uncovered between fathers' romantic relationship perceptions and supportive and undermining coparenting relationships. Father's reported dedication was positively associated with supportive coparenting at 3 months ($r = .17$, $p < .05$) and supportive coparenting at 9 months ($r = .17$, $p < .05$), and negatively associated with

undermining coparenting at 9 months (r = -.23, p < .01). This means that fathers who reported higher levels of dedication to their romantic relationships were part of more supportive coparenting relationships at 3 and 9 months and less undermining coparenting relationships at 9 months. Statistically significant correlations also existed between father's reported relationship confidence and supportive (r = .19, p < .05) and undermining (r = -.22, p < .01) coparenting relationships at 9 months. This means that fathers who reported higher levels of relationship confidence were part of coparenting relationships that were more supportive and less undermining at 9 months postpartum. Finally, statistically significant correlations were found between father's reported relationship avoidance and supportive (r = -.32, p < .01) and undermining (r = .31, p < .01) coparenting relationships at 9 months. This means that fathers who reported higher levels of relationship avoidance were part of coparenting relationship that were less supportive and more undermining at 9 months postpartum.

Associations Between Maternal Psychological and Relationship Characteristics and Observed Coparenting

Few significant correlations existed between maternal psychological and relationship characteristics and observed supportive and undermining coparenting at 3 and 9 months postpartum (see Table 3). There was a statistically significant positive correlation between mother's perspective-taking and supportive coparenting at 3 months (r = .15, p < .05). This means that mothers who reported higher levels of perspective-taking were part of more supportive coparenting relationships at 3 months. There was also a statistically significant positive correlation between mother's relationship dedication and supportive coparenting at 9 months (r = .17, p < .05). This indicates that mothers who reported more relationship dedication were part of more supportive coparenting relationships at 9 months. Additionally, a statistically

significant positive correlation appeared between mothers who reported more relationship constraint and undermining coparenting at 9 months ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). This indicates that mothers who reported more relationship constraint were part of more undermining coparenting relationships at 9 months. Additionally, at 9 months a statistically significant negative correlation existed between relationship conflict and support ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$), as well as, relationship dedication and undermining ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$). This means that mothers who reported more relationship conflict were part of less supportive coparenting relationships and mothers who reported more dedication were part of less undermining coparenting relationships.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine mothers' and fathers' reported psychological and relationship characteristics measured during their third trimester of pregnancy and their associations with observed supportive and undermining coparenting relationships at 3 and 9 months postpartum.

Psychological Predictors of Observed Coparenting

Results indicate that fathers' psychological characteristics are particularly important for the quality of the coparenting relationship. In general, for psychological characteristics, fathers who reported higher levels of perspective-taking and empathy and lower levels of personal distress had more supportive and less undermining coparenting relationships at 3 and 9 months postpartum. These results are consistent with my hypotheses. To be more specific, fathers who felt they have the ability to put themselves in somebody else's place and look at issues from another person's perspective were part of more supportive coparenting relationships. Additionally, fathers who are more empathetic are part of more supportive coparenting relationships. Fathers who have higher levels of perspective-taking and empathy are concerned

with and aware of other individuals' well-being which may explain why they are part of more supportive and less undermining coparenting relationships. These fathers may be concerned with their spouse's/partner's well-being, which may be perceived as support. McHale (1995) reported similar findings regarding mother's and father's perceived sense of being loved and cared for by others and the quality of the coparenting relationship. He found that mothers and fathers who reported higher levels of feeling loved and cared for by others were part of higher quality coparenting relationships. Additionally, fathers who reported higher levels of personal distress were part of less supportive and more undermining coparenting relationships. Fathers may lack effective or appropriate emotional regulation skills to handle their greater emotional reactivity in stressful situations, which negatively impacts the quality of the coparenting relationship.

Interestingly, fathers who expected themselves to be better parents (higher expected self-efficacy) were part of coparenting relationships described by observers as less supportive and more undermining. These fathers may believe that they are capable of handling parenting situations on their own or possibly even better than their spouse/partner, resulting in decreased supportive coparenting and increased undermining coparenting behavior.

Relationship Predictors of Observed Coparenting

Previous research that has focused on the association between marital quality and coparenting relationship quality has been reliable in predicting the quality of the coparenting relationship (Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011). Couples in well-functioning marriages are part of higher quality coparenting relationships (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1995; Katz & Gottman, 1996; McHale, 1995). Interestingly, my results indicate that fathers' reported relationship characteristics are particularly important for the quality of the coparenting relationship compared to mothers'. Fathers who reported higher levels of relationship dedication and confidence were

part of more supportive and less undermining coparenting relationships. Fathers who are dedicated to their relationships are more likely to be in the same relationship a few years from now and are committed to the relationship remaining strong. Furthermore, fathers who are confident that their relationship with their spouse/partner will endure through tough times are part of coparenting relationships that are more supportive and less undermining. It makes sense that fathers who are dedicated to their spouse/partner and confident in their relationship are part of more supportive and less undermining coparenting relationships. Consistent with previous research that used a less differentiated measure of the romantic relationship, fathers who reported higher levels of relationship avoidance were part of more undermining and less supportive coparenting relationships. Partners who reported discomfort with closeness and intimacy are more likely to be part of undermining coparenting relationships (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1995).

Why fathers?

Interestingly, the findings from the current study contradict previous research conducted by Van Egeren (2003), which concluded that mothers might be a driving force in the development of the coparenting relationship. However, research by Kolak and Volling (2007) found that only fathers' characteristics (e.g., expressiveness) were related to the quality of the coparenting relationship. The current study confirms the research concluding that fathers' characteristics play an important role in the development of the coparenting relationship. Minuchin (1974) suggested that men might experience more difficulty maintaining interpersonal boundaries than women. Fathers' inability to form interpersonal boundaries may explain why fathers' characteristics are more related to the coparenting relationship. Furthermore, researchers have reported that father-child interactions are disrupted by marital conflict, yet the mother-child relationship is not affected (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Brody, Pellegrini, &

Sigel, 1986). This previous research supports the current findings and may reveal that fathers' inability to form clear boundaries between their marital/spousal relationship and the father-child relationship may ultimately also affect the coparenting relationship.

Strengths and Limitations

There are strengths to this study. No prior research has explored the psychological and relationship predictors of supportive and undermining coparenting that were included in this study. Interrater reliability for the videotaped observations at 3 and 9 months was high. Additionally, strengths of utilizing data from the New Parents Project (NPP) should be noted. NPP has a longitudinal design, which is important to understanding the development of the coparenting relationship. Also, the NPP sample is relatively large in size when compared to previous studies of correlates of coparenting relationships.

Nonetheless, this study also had limitations. Any time self-reports are utilized they are subject to social desirability bias. Additionally, it should be noted that the NPP is not generalizable to the entire population due to the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. Another limitation is participant attrition that occurred across the span of the study. In certain situations, attrition can further bias samples.

Future Directions

Future plans include analyzing the parents' self-reports of supportive and undermining coparenting and seeing how they are related to the psychological and relationship characteristics. Additionally, assessing the association between parents' self-reported and observed coparenting is a future goal. Current research lacks the inclusion of both observations of coparenting and self-reports of coparenting, which are both important measures of the coparenting relationship (McHale & Rotman, 2007). Additionally, the degree of stability of the coparenting relationship

should be further assessed to determine if psychological and relationship characteristics measured at the transition to parenthood are predictive of the quality of the coparenting relationship beyond 9 months postpartum. Future research should replicate this study to include a more diverse population.

Conclusion

This study produced important information about the significance of the role of fathers' psychological and relationship characteristics in the quality of the coparenting relationship developed during the transition to parenthood. These findings can be used to pinpoint expectant couples that may be at risk for coparenting problems before they become parents.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Mother Perspective-Taking	3.66	0.62	180
Mother Empathy	4.09	0.56	180
Mother Personal Distress	2.47	0.68	180
Mother Expected Self-Efficacy	3.52	0.37	179
Mother Dedication	6.69	0.43	180
Mother Confidence	6.72	0.54	180
Mother Constraint	1.12	0.42	180
Mother Avoidance	1.87	0.80	179
Mother Anxiety	3.10	1.06	180
Mother Relationship Conflict	1.58	0.41	180
Father Perspective-Taking	3.46	0.65	174
Father Empathy	3.64	0.63	175
Father Personal Distress	2.08	0.62	174
Father Expected Self-Efficacy	3.45	0.42	168
Father Dedication	6.58	0.60	175
Father Confidence	6.66	0.58	175
Father Constraint	1.20	0.59	175
Father Avoidance	2.13	0.71	174
Father Anxiety	2.64	1.01	175
Father Relationship Conflict	1.61	0.46	175
Support (3 Mos.)	3.06	0.76	179
Undermining (3 Mos.)	1.45	0.42	179
Support (9 Mos.)	3.84	0.88	161
Undermining (9 Mos.)	1.52	0.64	161
Cooperation (3 Mos.)	3.36	0.96	179
Competition (3 Mos.)	1.94	0.98	179
Mother Warmth (3 Mos.)	3.00	0.79	179
Mother Coldness (3 Mos.)	1.13	0.40	179
Mother Pleasure (3 Mos.)	3.05	0.89	179
Mother Displeasure (3 Mos.)	1.26	0.58	179
Father Warmth (3 Mos.)	2.81	0.82	179
Father Coldness (3 Mos.)	1.23	0.55	179
Father Pleasure (3 Mos.)	2.79	0.89	179
Father Displeasure (3 Mos.)	1.18	0.51	179
Cooperation (9 Mos.)	3.98	0.96	161
Competition (9 Mos.)	1.61	0.81	161
Mother Warmth (9 Mos.)	3.79	0.90	161
Mother Coldness (9 Mos.)	1.27	0.57	161
Mother Pleasure (9 Mos.)	3.92	0.99	161
Mother Displeasure (9 Mos.)	1.63	0.86	161
Father Warmth (9 Mos.)	3.63	1.03	161
Father Coldness (9 Mos.)	1.40	0.75	161
Father Pleasure (9 Mos.)	3.75	1.03	161
Father Displeasure (9 Mos.)	1.60	0.89	161

Table 2: Correlations for Fathers

	Support (3 Mos.)	Undermining (3 Mos.)	Support (9 Mos.)	Undermining (9 Mos.)
Perspective-taking	.153	-.169*	.180*	-.127
Empathy	.078	-.073	.221**	-.196*
Personal Distress	-.176*	.165*	-.077	.154
Expected Self-Efficacy	-.215**	.167*	-.167*	.122
Dedication	.174*	-.142	.174*	-.225**
Confidence	.009	-.016	.190*	-.218**
Constraint	-.025	-.084	.039	-.031
Avoidance	-.049	.036	-.324**	.312**
Anxiety	.083	-.099	-.009	-.026
Relationship Conflict	.021	.031	-.151	.148

Note. Mos. = Months
*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 3: Correlations for Mothers

	Support (3 Mos.)	Undermining (3 Mos.)	Support (9 Mos.)	Undermining (9 Mos.)
Perspective-taking	.153*	-.107	.094	-.102
Empathy	.008	-.034	.081	-.025
Personal Distress	-.105	.056	.021	-.037
Expected Self-Efficacy	.008	-.051	.107	-.089
Dedication	.072	-.035	.145	-.163*
Confidence	.083	-.003	.173*	-.105
Constraint	-.094	.033	-.082	.169*
Avoidance	.059	-.021	-.075	.084
Anxiety	-.113	.116	-.139	.107
Relationship Conflict	-.098	.109	-.221**	.120

Note. Mos. = Months
*p < .05, **p < .01

Observed Coparenting Coding Manual

Cooperation: Reflects the degree to which parents help and support one another in teaching and playing with the child. Help and support between parents can be instrumental as well as emotional. For instance, for the pop-up toy, higher scores are warranted if one parent pushes the toy down in a helpful way. That would be an example of instrumental support.

(5) Very High Cooperation: Parents are very frequently cooperative. Cooperation seems effortless. They do not interrupt one another or distract from the other's interventions with the child.

(4) High Cooperation: Each parent builds on the other's efforts to help the child. There are a few instances of minimal interruption or distraction from the other parent's interactions. Cooperation is easy/smooth and frequent.

(3) Moderate Cooperation: Parents generally work well with and support each other, though there are times when helping one another lapses and parents appear less in concert.

(2) Low Cooperation: Parents are usually not supportive or working together; they appear to have separate ways of working with their child. Occasionally, they'll share the same approach.

(1) Very Low Cooperation: No effort is made by parents to support and assist each other. Parents appear to be working with the child independently.

Competition: Parents try to outdo each other's efforts to teach, work, and play with the child. Lower-level competition includes parents using different approaches with the child but this type of competition seems accidental. At lower and moderate levels, couples lack coordination. But,

in couples that receive higher ratings, parents appear to be intentionally competing for the child's attention.

(5) Very High Competition: Efforts to outdo one another's teaching/playing take precedence over helping the child learn. Competition is consistent and obvious throughout all parts of the interaction. Parents' main concern is clearly to outdo each other.

(4) High Competition: Parents may be playing with the child, but frequently try to outdo each other to get the attention of the child. There are multiple instances of competition, but it is not seen in all parts of the interaction.

(3) Moderate Competition: There are multiple low-level instances of competition or 1 very strong instance seen.

(2) Low Competition: Occasionally, a comment or behavior will be made by one parent suggesting that they feel they have a more effective parenting strategy, though it comes across as constructive (or accidental) and not challenging. May be 1 instance of trying to mildly out-do each other.

(1) Very Low Competition: No competition visible.

Individual Maternal/Paternal Scales

Warmth: One parent demonstrates affection and positive regard for the other; laughing, touching, smiling, saying nice things to each other. Parent attempts to involve the other in the interaction – a connection is felt and can be seen between them. Parent provides emotional support, reassurance, and encouragement for the other in an authentic, not sarcastic, manner.

(5) Very High Warmth: Continual expressions of warmth (i.e. smiling, laughing, touching, gazing into each other's eyes) fill the episode. If coders see any expressions of physical affection (hugs, kisses, holding hands), a "5" should be seriously considered.

(4) High Warmth: One parent clearly demonstrates affection for the other. This warmth may be visible or just a general feeling of connectedness between them. The warmth, however, is not as pervasive as would be seen in a level (5).

(3) Moderate Warmth: Parent displays a reasonable amount of affection for the other. The sense of connectedness is apparent but not striking. The parent interacts lovingly, at times, with the other (smiles, positive comments, etc.), but this behavior or the connection behind it is not apparent throughout the episode.

(2) Low Warmth: Parent is less open and relatively tentative in their display of affection for their partner. There is a very limited sense of connectedness between them.

(1) Very Low Warmth: No warmth visible or felt from partners; seem disconnected from each other.

Coldness: Parent seems distant, closed-off, and lacks affection for the other. There is a sense of the parent keeping a distance between his/her partner. This is visible though curtness (shortness), snubbing (ignoring), hostile responses, or a general lack of response towards the other parent's attempts to engage in interaction.

(5) Very High Coldness: Non-engagement with partner predominates and appears to be intentional. Parent seems disinterested in partner and *disdain* is visible. One parent has no reaction to the other AT ALL. **(Some snubbing must be seen).**

(4) High Coldness: Parent interacts with partner, but in a clearly withdrawn or distant fashion. Parent rejects partner's attempts for closeness (this may be *emotional or physical*). Frequent snubbing is seen. **(Some snubbing must be seen).**

(3) Moderate Coldness: Parent lacks interaction with partner throughout entire episode OR some mild snubbing (verbal or nonverbal) of partner's attempts get close to the other partner (physically or emotionally). There are multiple low level snubbing instances or 1 strong instance shown.

(2) Low Coldness: Some withdrawal is visible. Parent is generally open to his/her partner and to their attempts for warmth without necessarily initiating this contact themselves. There may be 1 instance of low level snubbing OR a slight distance between partners. They do not interact much but are not necessarily hostile.

(1) Very Low Coldness: No coldness visible between parents.

Pleasure: The parent appears to enjoy sharing and collaborating in the parental role and is able to demonstrate that during the interaction. The partner appears to take pleasure in the OTHER PARENT'S relationship with the child. They are able to watch comfortably when the other is interacting individually with the baby. The parent displays playfulness and humor with the other about their respective parenting styles/practices and their relationship with the child.

(5) Very High Pleasure: Such expressions of pleasure and appreciation are very frequent and of high intensity throughout the entire episode. Parent is very attentive and thoroughly enjoys watching partner play with the child. The parent may smile lovingly while the other is playing, showing no negative emotion or disinterest whatsoever.

(4) High Pleasure: Parent expresses/shows their enjoyment and appreciation of how their partner plays with the child and of the relationship between their partner and the child.

They can comfortably share involvement with their partner or enjoy watching the dyad together. Intensity of pleasure, however, is not as high as in a level (5).

(3) Moderate Pleasure: Parent seems to enjoy partner's relationship with child and parenting with their partner. However, enjoyment is not present at all times and is generally muted in some way. The parent's enjoyment of the other is partly inferred rather than directly observed.

(2) Low Pleasure: Though parent does not necessarily show negative feelings toward the other, they show enjoyment of the other parent's relationship with the child only on occasion.

(1) No Pleasure: No pleasure is visible between parents. Their response to partner's relationship is either neutral or negative in tone.

Displeasure: The parent expresses dislike of their partner's style of interacting with the child either directly or indirectly (sarcasm). This can be a reaction to the positivity or negativity in their relationship. Parents do not enjoy working together.

(5) Very High Displeasure: Parent is displeased OR threatened by other parent's relationship with the child. Displeasure characterizes the episode. This may be expressed through *comments or gestures throughout the episode* ("He likes playing with you more than me" "Don't hold her like that!" or rolling of the eyes) (at least 2 comments and low level expressions/behaviors).

(4) High Displeasure: One parent actively shows or says they dislike how the other is parenting, or criticizes the other's relationship with the child. Statements are overt and feelings are clearly shown, though not as often as in a level (5) (Multiple comments).

(3) Moderate Displeasure: Predominately sarcastic or subtle comments or tone during interaction suggest a parent's dislike of the other's relationship with the child, OR on only one occasion a partner shows one clear comment indicating displeasure OR multiple low level displeasure indications.

(2) Low Displeasure: Parent is generally unbothered by their partner's relationship with the child; however, they might occasionally jab or otherwise indicate some negative feelings. *Non-verbal* indications of displeasure: laughter, sounds, or faces. If situations are difficult to decipher but appear to possibly be negative in some way score a 2.

(1) Very Low Displeasure: No displeasure is visible.

Perception of Competence: This scale measures each parent's observed/inferred feelings of how competent they are as a parent. It measures their confidence in their abilities to interact with the baby without assistance from the other parent.

(5) Very High Competence: Parent seems to perceive themselves as quite competent with the baby. They perform tasks with a self-assured attitude, and portray themselves as extremely competent throughout the episode. The parent seems to have implicit knowledge of the baby's preferences, which is likely derived from a history of time spent with the baby. Interactions and tasks are performed fluidly, not awkwardly, and they do not make any negative attributions about their own competence with the baby.

(4) High Competence: The parent seems to perceive themselves as handling the task well and is in control of the situation with the baby; they are clearly more confident than not. Although some slight doubt about their own abilities could be introduced, it is rather mild in intensity, and does not detract from their perception of their confidence. Nonverbal or

subtle doubt; faces, laughter, etc. General sense of hesitance about certain aspect of parenting skill.

(3) Moderate Competence: The parent portrays themselves as fairly confident and secure in their interactions with the baby, but may also question their ability to respond to the baby's needs. The tone is not that the parent perceives themselves as unable to handle the baby; but rather, the parent questions a particular aspect of their level of ability with the baby. This may be seen in a comment they make about a particular action they took with the baby, questioning their decision. One comment is made such as, "You're not making this very easy for me!" (to the baby). The parent seems uncomfortable at times, but still completes tasks.

(2) Low Competence: The parent portrays themselves as not being very competent with the baby during the episode, although some slight confidence about how to handle the baby might be indicated. One parent may not involve themselves much with the baby, or they may make several self-deprecating comments during the episode ("I made her upset"), but confidence is not completely lacking. More than one self-deprecating comment is made by the parent.

(1) Very Low Competence: Parent seems to strongly question his/her competence level. S/he makes several negative comments about his/her abilities throughout the entire episode and perceives the self as being rather inadequate in handling the baby. No positive attributions toward their own interactions with the baby are made. May defer to other parent for tasks they doubt their skill in.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980)

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by circling the appropriate number. READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can.

	Doesn't describe me well				Describes me well
1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.	1	2	3	4	5
4. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.	1	2	3	4	5
6. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
9. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.	1	2	3	4	5
11. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.	1	2	3	4	5
13. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.	1	2	3	4	5

14. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I tend to lose control during emergencies.	1	2	3	4	5
19. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.	1	2	3	4	5
20. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.	1	2	3	4	5

Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale (Teti & Gelfand, 1991)

We want to ask you some questions about your expectations for yourself and your baby. We are trying to get a general idea of how well you believe you will handle different situations with your baby. We know some of these questions may be hard to answer now, but think about how you believe things will be after your baby is born. We realize that no one can be always effective or always ineffective. We all do better in some situations than in others. So we would like to have you think about some situations that all parents of infants encounter.

1. When your baby is upset, fussy, or crying, how good will you be at soothing him or her?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

2. How good will you be at understanding what your baby wants or needs? For example, will you know when your baby needs to be changed or wants to be fed?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

3. How good will you be at making your baby understand what you want him/her to do? For example, if you want your baby to eat or play quietly, how good will you be at making her or him do that?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

4. How good will you be at getting your baby to pay attention to you? For example, when you want your baby to look at you, how good will you be at making him or her do it?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

5. How good will you be at getting your baby to have fun with you? For example, how good will you be at getting your baby to smile and laugh with you?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

6. How good will you be at knowing what activities your baby will enjoy? For example, how good will you be at knowing what games and toys your baby will like to play with?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

7. How good will you be at keeping your baby occupied when you need to do housework? For example, how good will you be at finding things for your baby to do when you need to do the dishes?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

8. How good do you feel you will be at feeding, changing, and bathing your baby?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

9. How good will you be at getting your baby to show off for visitors? For example, how good will you be at making your baby smile or laugh for people who visit?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

10. In general, how good a parent do you feel you will be with your baby?

1	2	3	4
not good at all	not good enough	good enough	very good

Commitment Inventory (Stanley and Markman, 1992; Stanley, Hoyer, & Trathen, 1994; Whitton et al., 2007)
Please answer each of the following questions by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

1. My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her".
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I am very confident when I think of our future together.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I feel trapped or stuck in this relationship.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I would leave my partner if it was not so difficult to do so.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I stay with my partner because I have to stay, not because I want to stay.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. If I didn't have so much to lose by leaving this relationship, I would leave my partner.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Experiences in Close Relationships (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)
The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. We'd like you to respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Please ***circle the number*** *that best corresponds to your agreement or disagreement with the statement to the left.*

	Disagree strongly			Neutral /mixed			Agree strongly
1. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I worry about being abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I worry a lot about my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Just when my partner starts to get close to me, I find myself pulling away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

pulling back.

12. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I worry about being alone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I do not often worry about being abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

get upset or angry.

25. I tell my partner just about everything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. I resent when my partner spends time away from me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Negative Interaction Scale (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002)

Now I'd like you to tell me how often you and your spouse/partner experience each of the following situations.

1. Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts.

   Never or almost never Once in a while Frequently

2. My spouse/partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires.

   Never or almost never Once in a while Frequently

3. My spouse/partner seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be.

   Never or almost never Once in a while Frequently

4. When we argue, one of us withdraws…that is, does not talk about it anymore, or leaves the scene.

   Never or almost never Once in a while Frequently